

✓ Latest release

Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia

Statistics about participation in formal study, work-related training and personal interest learning.

Reference period 2020-21 financial year

Released 11/03/2022

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Key statistics

- 42% of Australians aged 15-74 years had participated in learning in the last 12 months (7.8 million people).
- One in five (21%) were studying for a formal qualification.
- Just under a quarter (23%) did work-related training.
- Online learning was the most common way work-related training was delivered: rates more than doubled from 19% in 2016-17 to 55% in 2020-21.

Participation in study or learning

In 2020-21, 42% of Australians aged 15-74 years had participated in learning over the past 12 months (7.8 million people). This was a small increase from 41% in 2016-17 (7.2 million people).

This learning may have been:

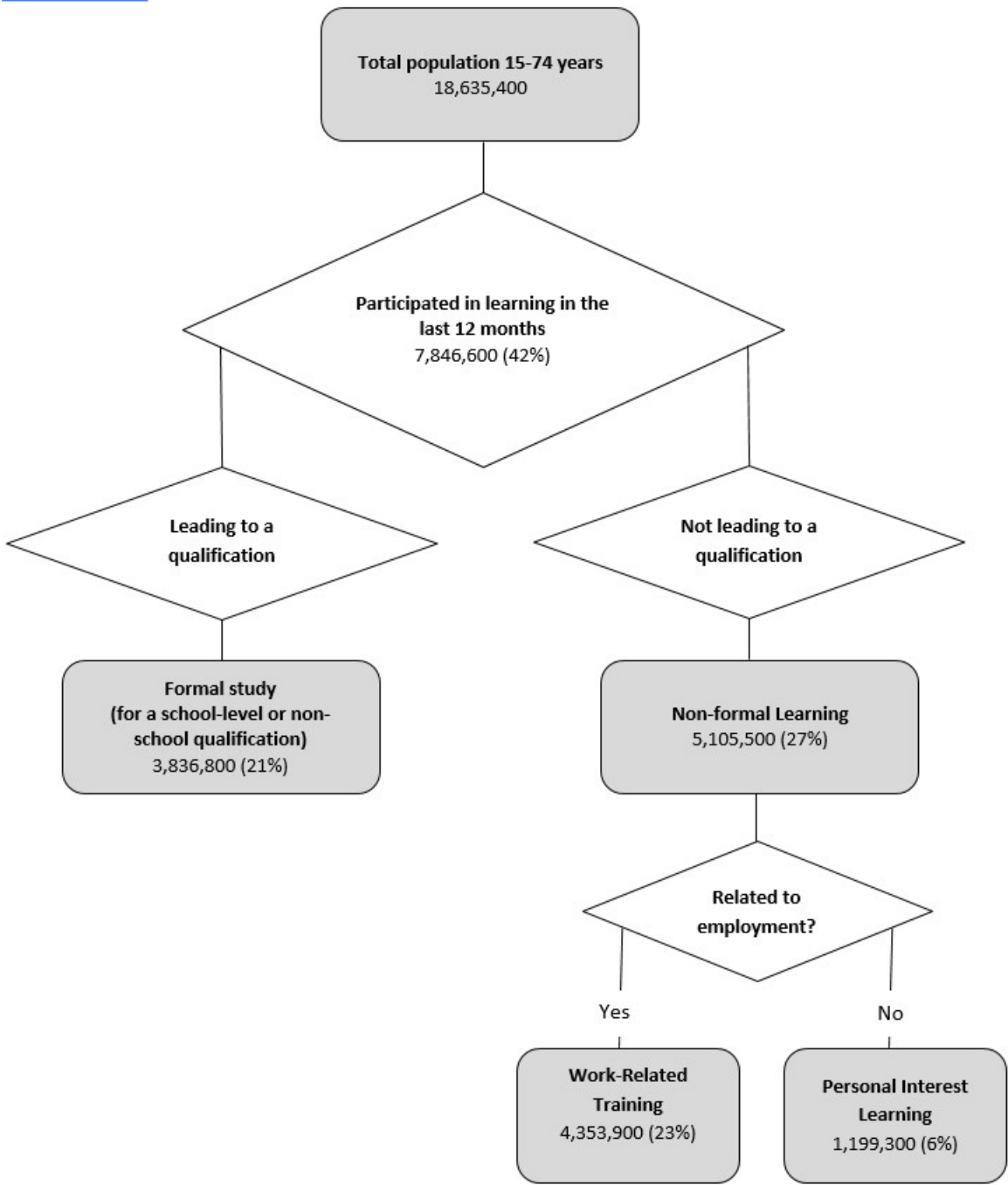
- formal study for a qualification such as a certificate, diploma or degree
- non-formal learning (work-related training or personal interest learning)
- both formal study and non-formal learning.

Around 3.8 million people (21%) had studied for a qualification, while 5.1 million (27%) did non-formal learning. Just

under 1.1 million people (6%) did a mixture of both.

Forms of learning in the survey

[View full screen](#)

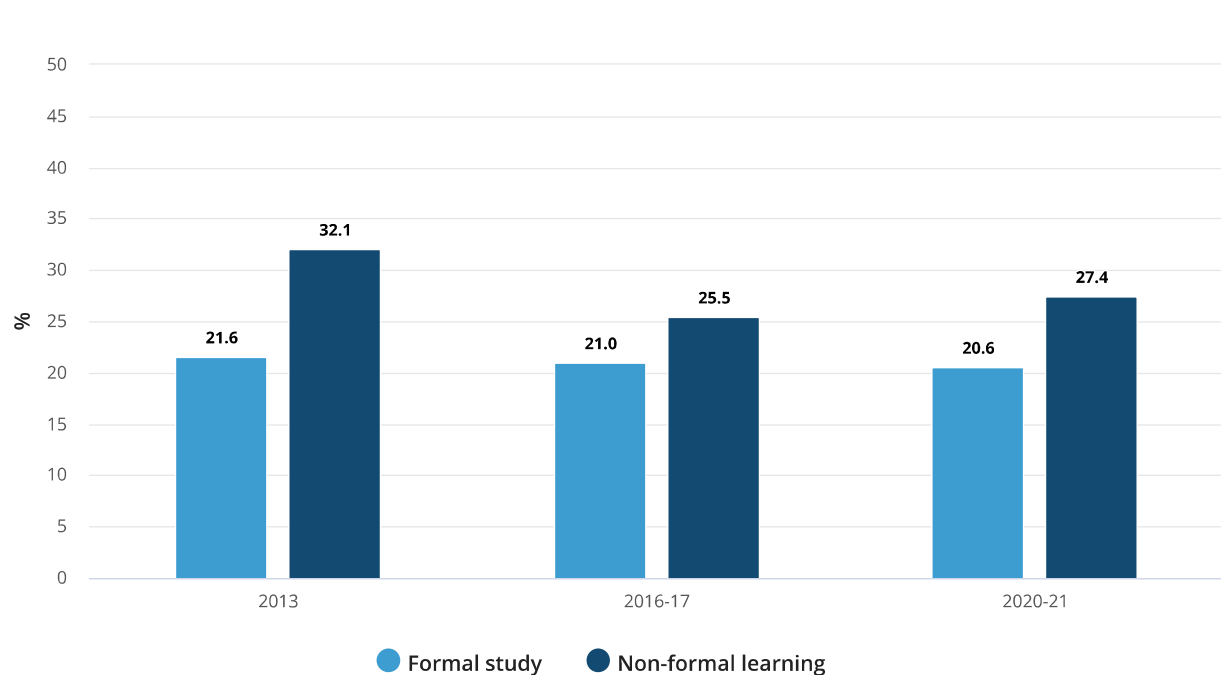


Feedback

Participation over time

Formal study remained relatively steady over the eight years from 2013 at around 21% of people aged 15-74 years, but non-formal learning decreased from 32% in 2013 to 27% in 2020-21. This was mainly driven by a drop in work-related training, which had decreased overall from 27% in 2013 to 23% in 2020-21, although there had been a slight rise from 22% in 2016-17.

1. Participation in learning, 2013 to 2020-21(a)(b)(c)



- a. All persons aged 15-74 years.
- b. There were changes in collection methods between the surveys in 2013 and 2016-17. See the Methodology section for details.
- c. People could do more than one type of learning so components may not add up to totals.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2013, 2016-17 and 2020-21, Table 1

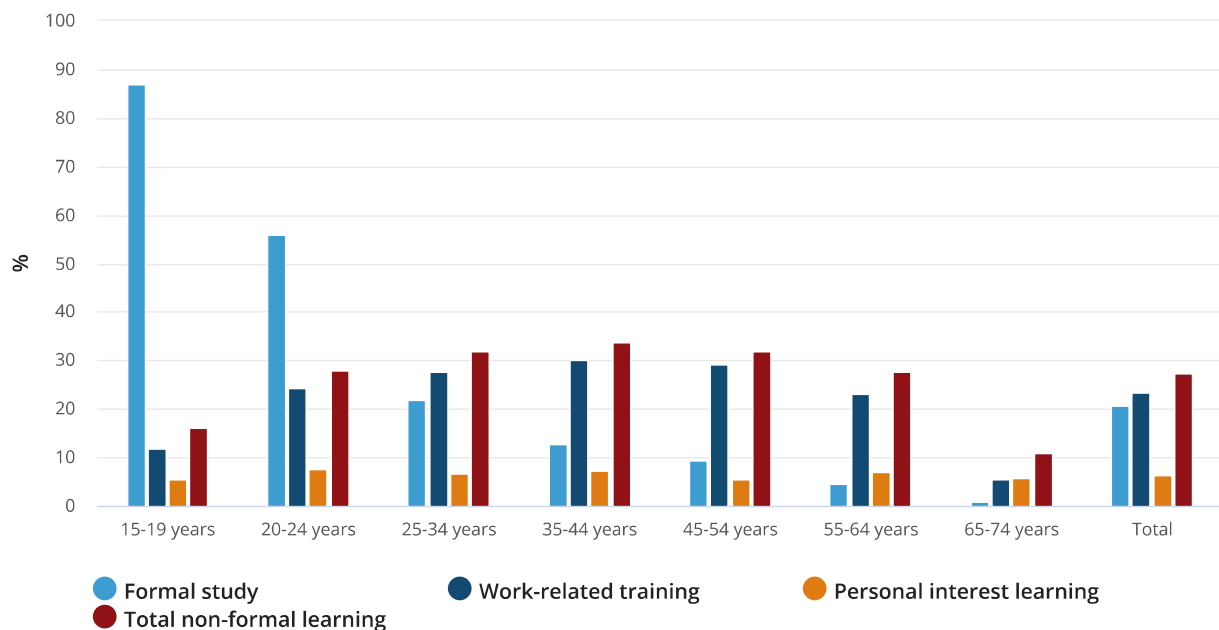


Participation by selected characteristics

Women were a little more likely to be training or studying than men: 22% were doing formal study compared with 19% of men, and 29% were doing non-formal learning compared with 26% of men.

Younger people were the most likely to be studying for a qualification (87% of 15-19 year olds and 56% of 20-24 year olds), while people aged 25 and over were more likely to be doing non-formal learning.

2. Participation in learning, by age(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

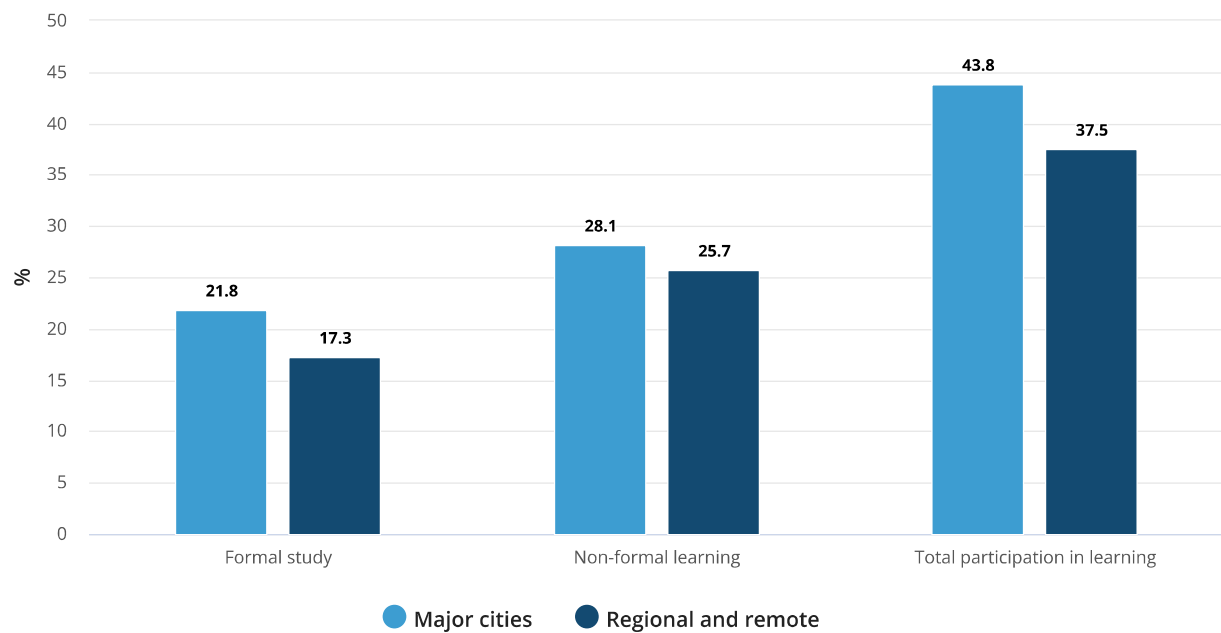
Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 2

People with multiple jobs were more likely to be doing some sort of learning than people with a single job: 3 in 5 people (60%) with multiple jobs were participating in learning, compared with slightly under half (47%) of people with a single job.

While people born overseas were more likely to have a non-school qualification, they were slightly less likely to have studied or trained in the past 12 months (40%) than people born in Australia (43%).

More people were formally studying in major cities (22%) than in regional and remote areas of Australia (17%). There was only a small difference in rates of non-formal learning by remoteness, however, with 26% of people in regional and remote areas and 28% in major cities participating in work-related training and personal interest learning.

3. Participation in learning, by remoteness(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

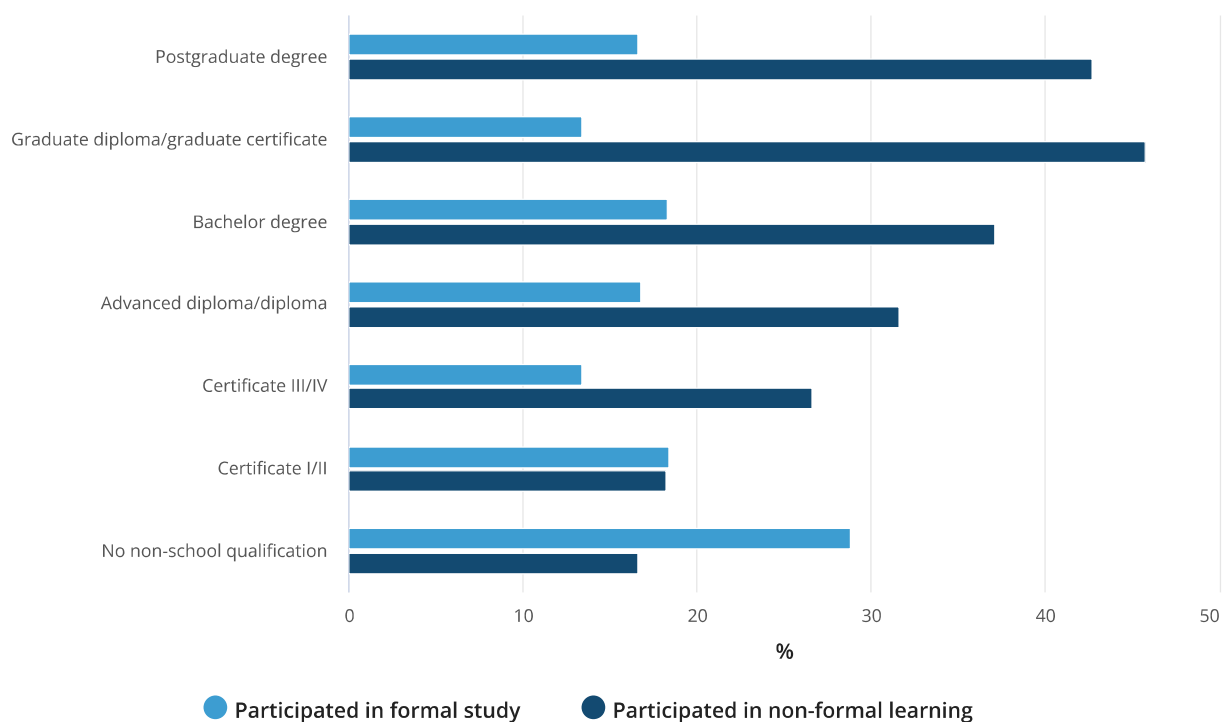
Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

Using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage, people living in areas of least disadvantage (highest quintile) were more likely to be training or studying (47%) than those in the most disadvantaged areas (lowest quintile) (33%).

Qualifications and learning

People with a non-school qualification were more likely to do non-formal learning (34%) than formal study (16%), while those without a non-school qualification were more likely to be studying for a qualification (29%) than doing non-formal learning (17%).

4. Participation in learning, by level of highest non-school qualification attained(a)



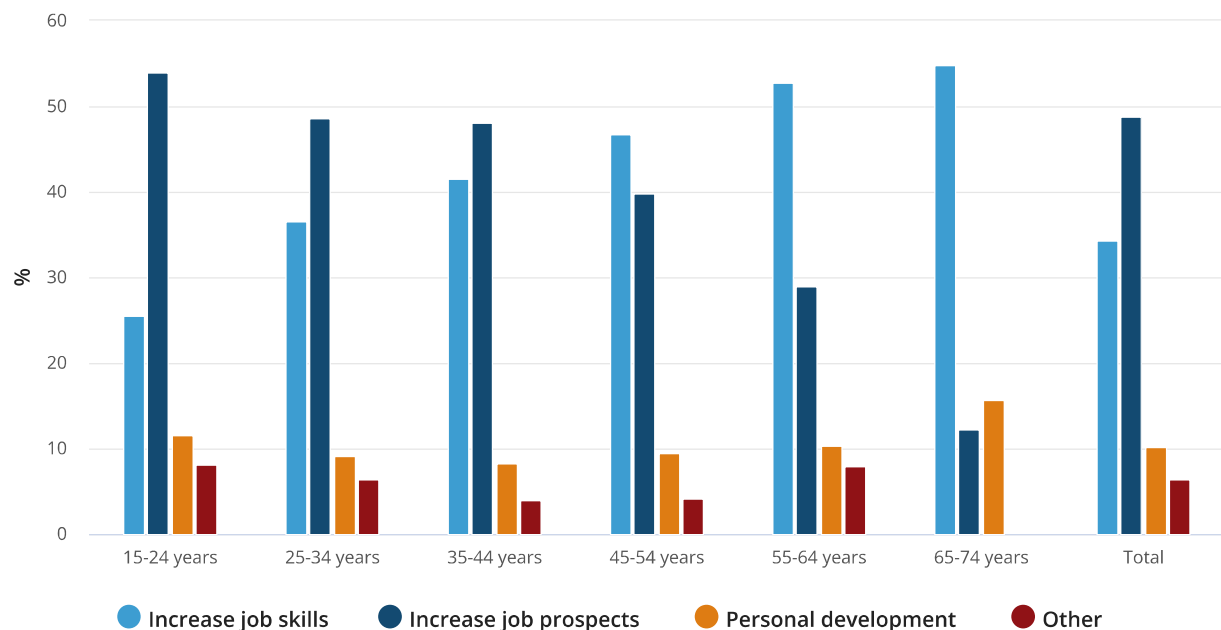
a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 1

Reasons for participating in learning

Almost half (49%) of people who did formal study in the past year said it was to increase their job prospects, while around a third (34%) said it was to increase skills in their job or was required for their job. One in ten (10%) were doing formal study for enjoyment or other personal development reasons, such as increasing their skills for community or voluntary work, or meeting new people. People aged 45 years and over were more interested in increasing their skills for an existing job than people under 45 years.

5. Main reason for participating in formal study over the past 12 months(a)



a. Persons aged 15-74 years who participated in formal study.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 3

Increasing skills for their job or the fact that training was compulsory were the main reasons people undertook work-related training, regardless of age or sex. However, men were slightly more likely to have done work-related training to increase their job prospects (6%) than women (4%).

Learning new skills or increasing existing ones was the main reason people gave for participating in personal interest learning, but those aged 25-54 years were more skills-focussed than people aged 15-24 years or 65 years and over, who were more likely to do these courses for interest, enjoyment or personal development.

Work-related training

Around 4.4 million Australians (23%) aged 15-74 years had undertaken work-related training in the past 12 months - that is, training or courses which did not form part of a qualification, and were undertaken for work purposes.

Participation rates were similar for women (24%) and men (23%), although they differed slightly for employed women and men (35% and 30% respectively).

While people aged 20-64 years (traditionally seen as 'working age') were the most likely to have done work-related training (27%), 12% of 15-19 year olds and 6% of 65-74 year olds had also done work-related training in the past year.

The majority of people (91%) did work-related training to increase their skills for their job, while 5% did this training to increase their job prospects.

Employees were more than twice as likely to have participated in work-related training as part of their current main job (33%) as business owner/managers (15%).

People with skill level 1 jobs (the highest skill level, such as pharmacists, architects, and school principals) were twice as likely to have done work-related training in their current jobs (40%) as people with skill level 5 jobs, such as telemarketers, factory process workers, and domestic cleaners (19%).

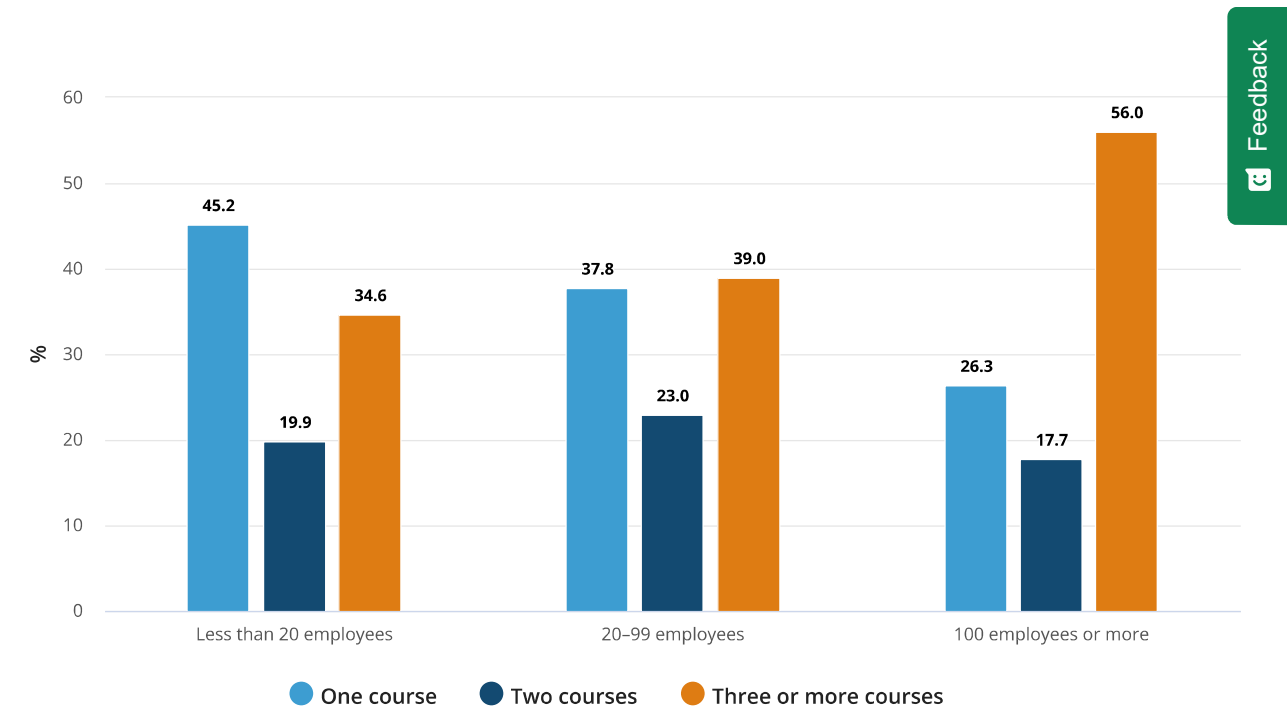
People who did their work-related training as part of their current main job used the skills or knowledge gained from the training more frequently. A quarter (25%) reported always using skills or knowledge gained from their training, compared with 14% of people who did not do their training as part of their current main job (i.e. they may have done it for a second job or a previous job).

Number of courses completed and total hours spent

Around two-thirds of people who did work-related training in the last 12 months had completed more than one course. One-third (33%) did one course only, 19% did two courses, and just under half (48%) did three or more courses over the year.

People working in larger businesses (100 employees or more throughout Australia) were more likely to have done three or more training courses in their current main job (56%) than those in businesses with 20-99 employees (39%), or less than 20 employees (35%).

6. Number of work-related training courses completed, by size of business worked in(a)(b)



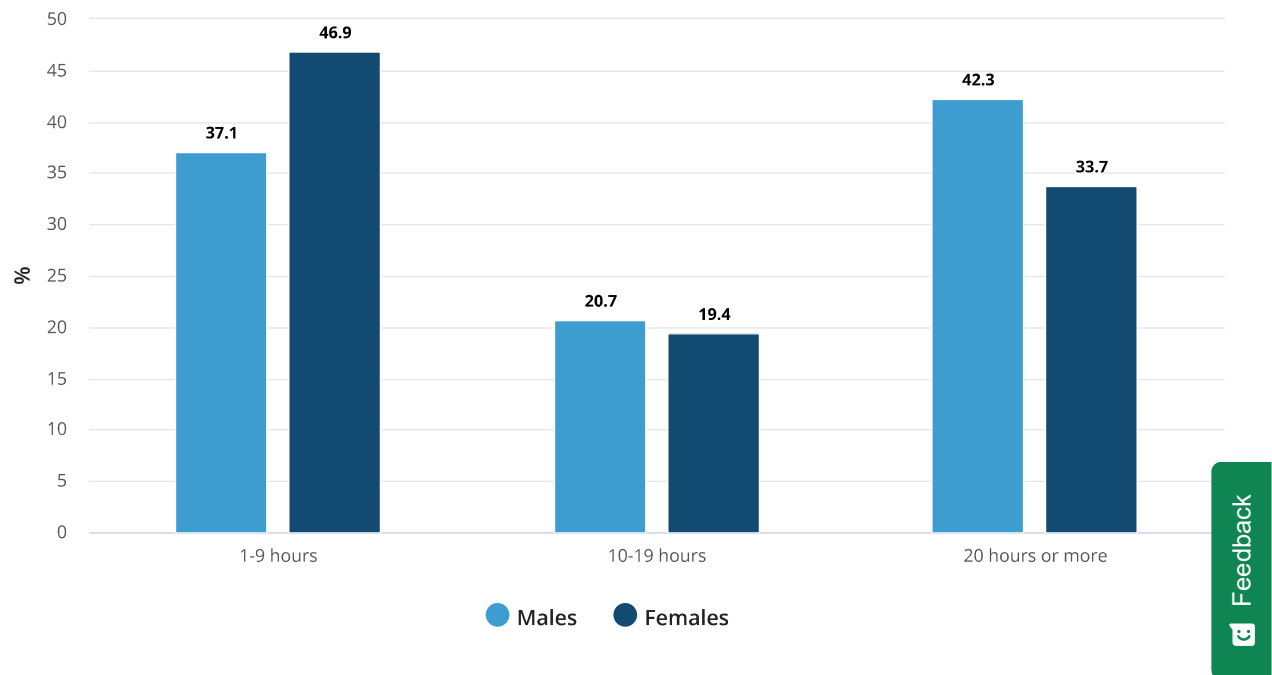
- a. Employed persons aged 15-74 years who participated in work-related training for their current main job.
- b. Size of business throughout Australia (self-reported by respondent).

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 8

Around 42% of people spent less than 10 hours completing their most recent training course, while 20% spent 10-19 hours, and 38% spent 20 hours or more.

Men were more likely than women to have spent 20 hours or more on their most recent training (42% compared with 34%), while women were more likely to have done the shorter courses (47% spending 1-9 hours compared with 37% of men).

7. Total hours spent on most recent work-related training, by sex(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who participated in work-related training in the last 12 months.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

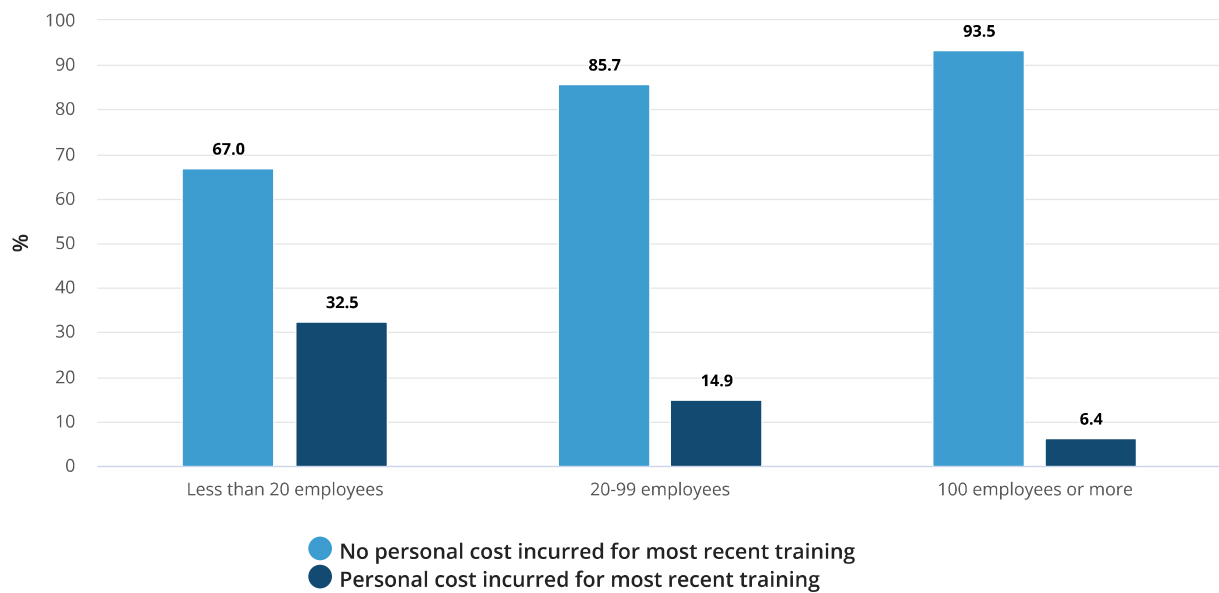
Personal costs for most recent work-related training

Approximately one in seven people (14%) incurred a cost for their most recent work-related training. People who had only done one work-related training course in the last 12 months were the most likely to have incurred personal costs for their most recent training (18%), compared with those who had done two courses (15%), or three or more courses (10%).

One in two people who owned or managed a business (50%) incurred costs for their most recent work-related training, compared with one in ten employees (10%). Business owner/managers were more likely to have personal costs over \$200 for their most recent work-related training than employees (37% compared with 6%).

People working in larger businesses (100 employees or more throughout Australia) were more likely to have done work-related training in their current main job at no personal cost: 94% compared with 86% of those in businesses with 20-99 employees and 67% of those in businesses with less than 20 employees.

8. Whether incurred costs for work-related training in current main job, by size of business worked in(a)(b)



a. Employed persons aged 15-74 years who participated in work-related training for their current main job.

b. Size of business throughout Australia (self-reported by respondent).

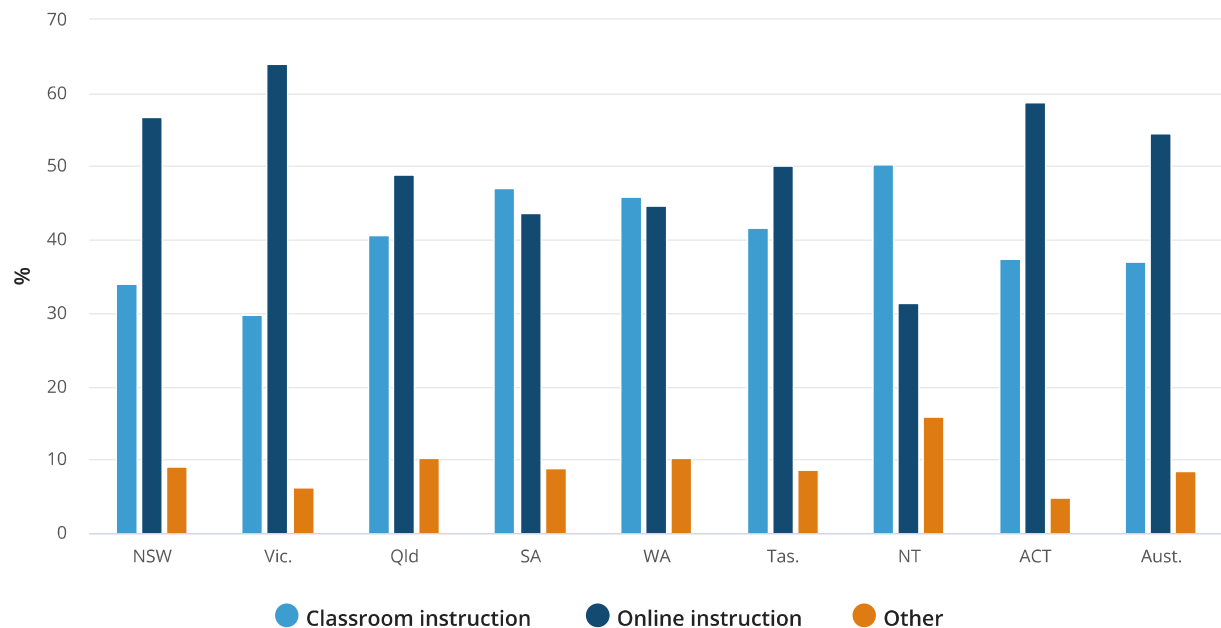
Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 11

Feedback

Method of delivery for most recent work-related training

More than half (55%) of people did their most recent work-related training course mainly through online delivery, while 37% were mainly classroom-based, and the remaining 9% had other types of delivery, such as field training or work experience. Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales had the highest rates of online delivery (64%, 59% and 57% respectively).

9. Main method used to deliver most recent work-related training, by state and territory(a)

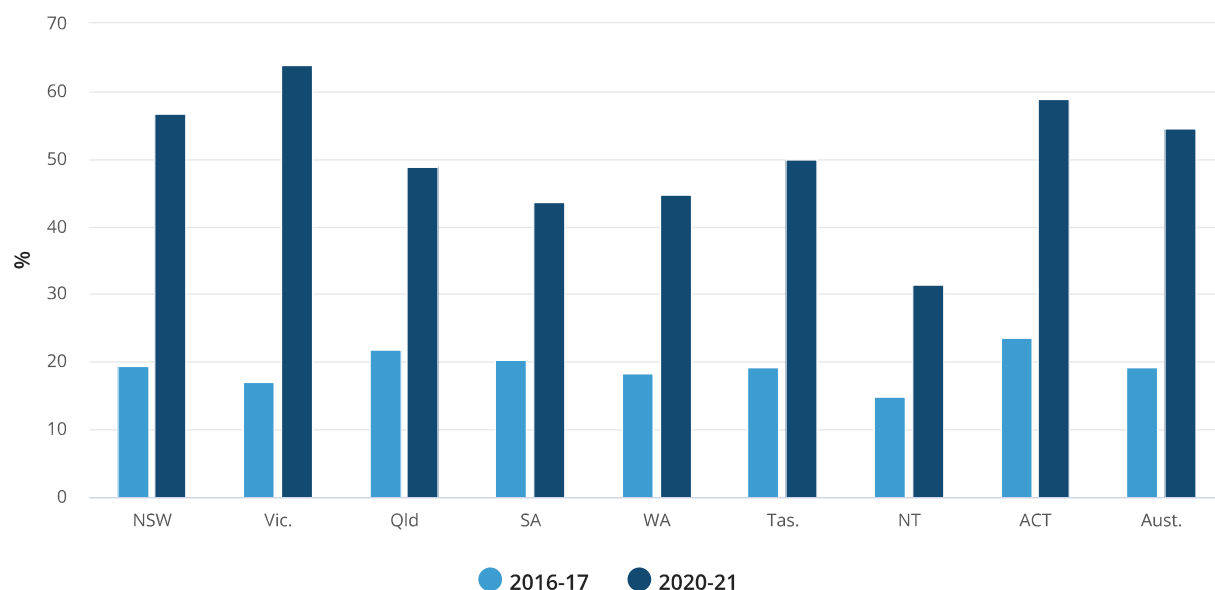


a. All persons aged 15-74 years who participated in work-related training in the last 12 months.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 4

Completing work-related training online has more than doubled over the last four years, from 19% in 2016-17 to 55% in 2020-21. This increase can be seen across all the states and territories, with some states such as Victoria and the ACT recording rates more than three times higher. The increase may be partially due to public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the survey period (July 2020 to June 2021), including lockdowns in some states and territories.

10. Online delivery of most recent work-related training, by state and territory, 2016-17 and 2020-21(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who participated in work-related training in the last 12 months.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2016-17 Table 3, 2020-21 Table 4

More than a third (37%) of people's most recent work-related training in their current main job was delivered by a consultant, while 32% was delivered by an existing staff member, and 29% by another external training provider. Just over half (51%) of technicians and trades workers had their training delivered by a consultant, compared with 44% of managers, 32% of labourers, and 26% of sales workers.

11. Training delivery of most recent work-related course, by occupation(a)



a. Employed persons aged 15-74 who participated in work-related training for their current main job.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2020-21, Table 9

Just under one in five people (18%) who had done work-related training in the past 12 months did not spend any time with a teacher or instructor for their most recent course. Most people (43%) spent 1-9 hours with a teacher or instructor, followed by 32% spending 10-49 hours, and 8% spending 50 hours or more.

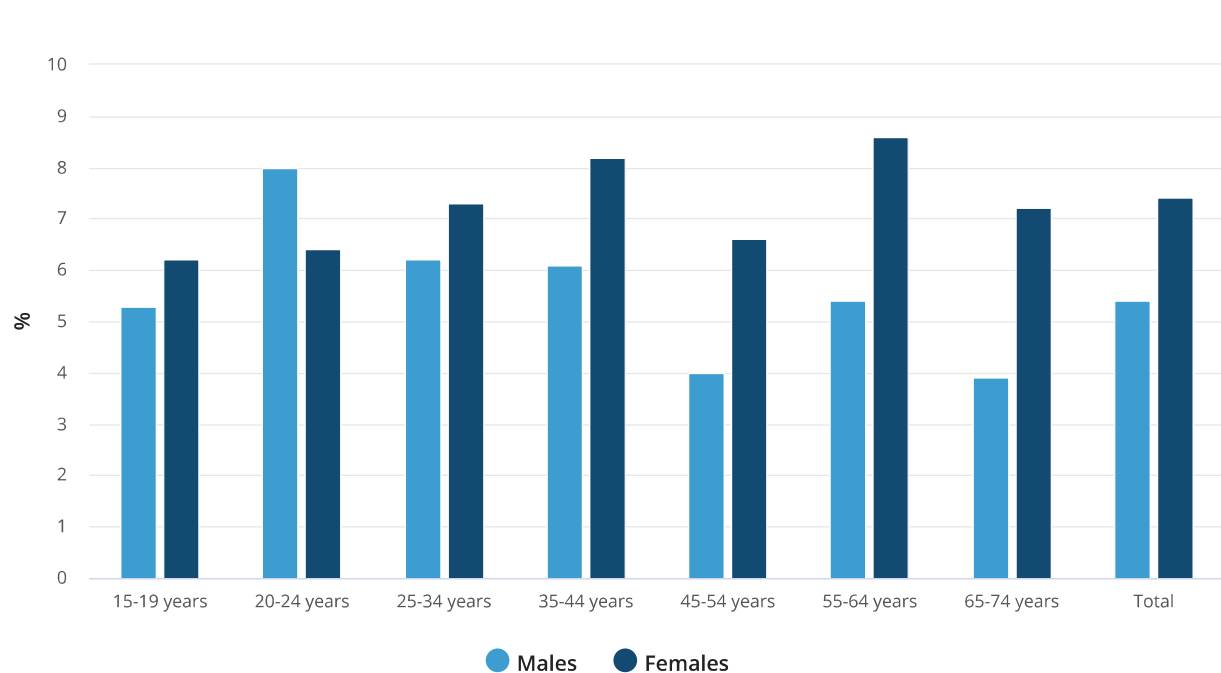
Business owner/managers were more likely than employees to have spent no time with a teacher or instructor during their most recent work-related training course (24% compared with 17%).

Personal interest learning

In 2020-21, 1.2 million Australians aged 15-74 years (6%) had participated in personal interest learning in the past 12 months. Personal interest learning is defined as courses that did not lead to a recognised qualification and were not undertaken for work.

On the whole, women were slightly more likely to do personal interest learning than men (7% compared with 5%), particularly those aged 45 years and over. However, rates for young men and women were similar (7% each for those aged 15-24 years).

12. Participation in personal interest learning, by age by sex(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 2

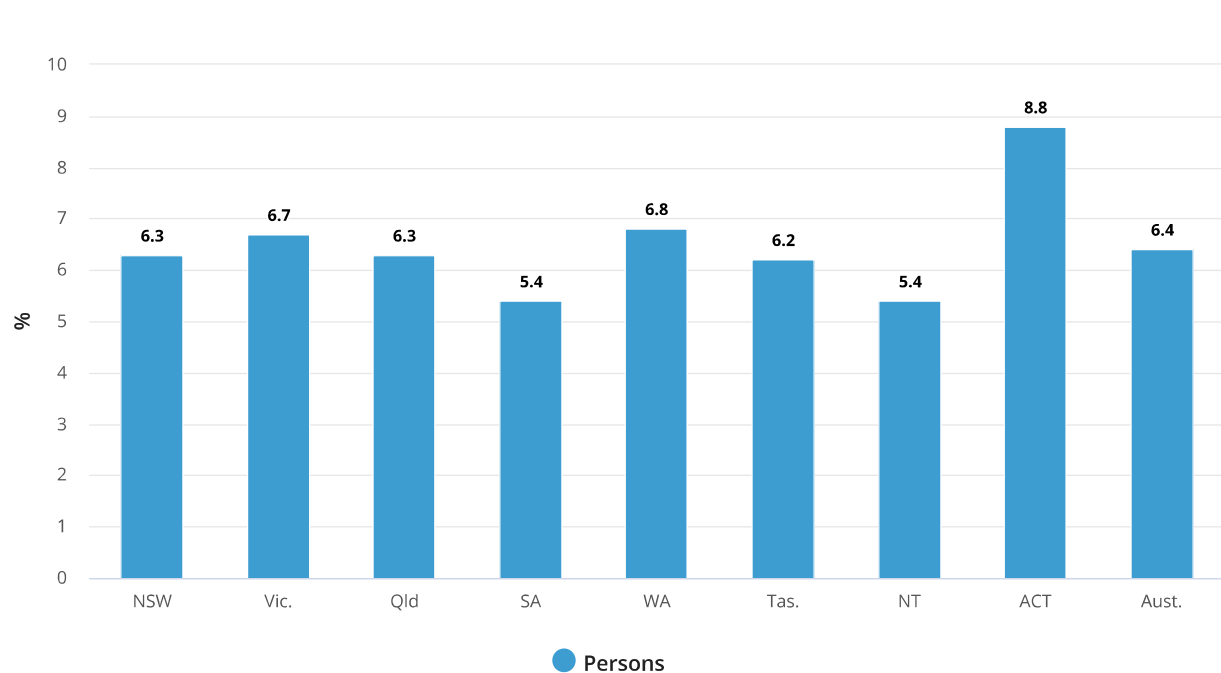
Over a third (35%) of people who did personal interest learning did more than one course in the past 12 months.

Around 39% of people had mainly done their most recent course to improve their skills or learn new ones (39%). A third of people (33%) said the main reason they participated was for enjoyment or interest, and just under a quarter (23%) said it was for personal development.

People with a bachelor degree or above were twice as likely to participate in personal interest learning as those without one (10% compared with 5%).

At least 5% of people in every state and territory had done personal interest learning in the past year. People living in the ACT had the highest rate of participation (9%).

13. Participation in personal interest learning, by state and territory(a)

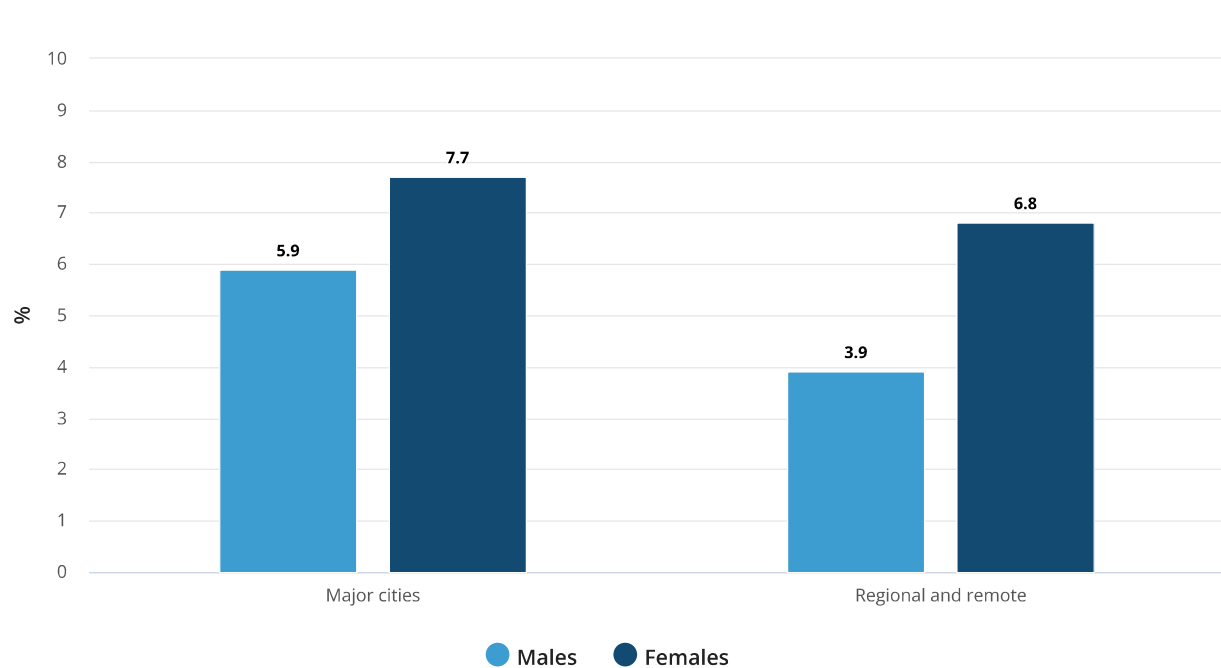


a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 2

Men living in major cities were a little more likely to have participated in personal interest learning than those in regional and remote areas (6% compared with 4%), however, rates for women in these areas were closer together (8% and 7% respectively).

14. Participation in personal interest learning, by remoteness by sex(a)

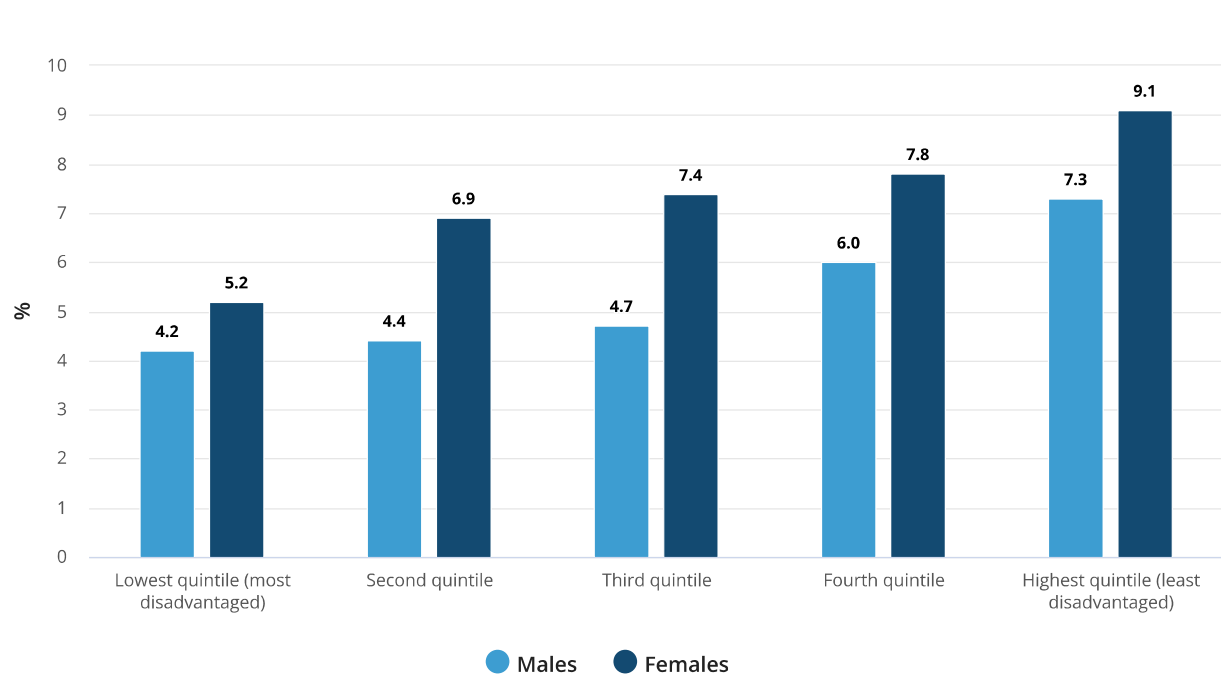


a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

Participation in personal interest learning varied by economic circumstances. Using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage, people in the most disadvantaged areas had the lowest rate of participation (5%, compared with 8% of those in the least disadvantaged areas). This trend was also seen with income, with participation increasing by level of equivalised household income.

15. Participation in personal interest learning, by disadvantage by sex(a)(b)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

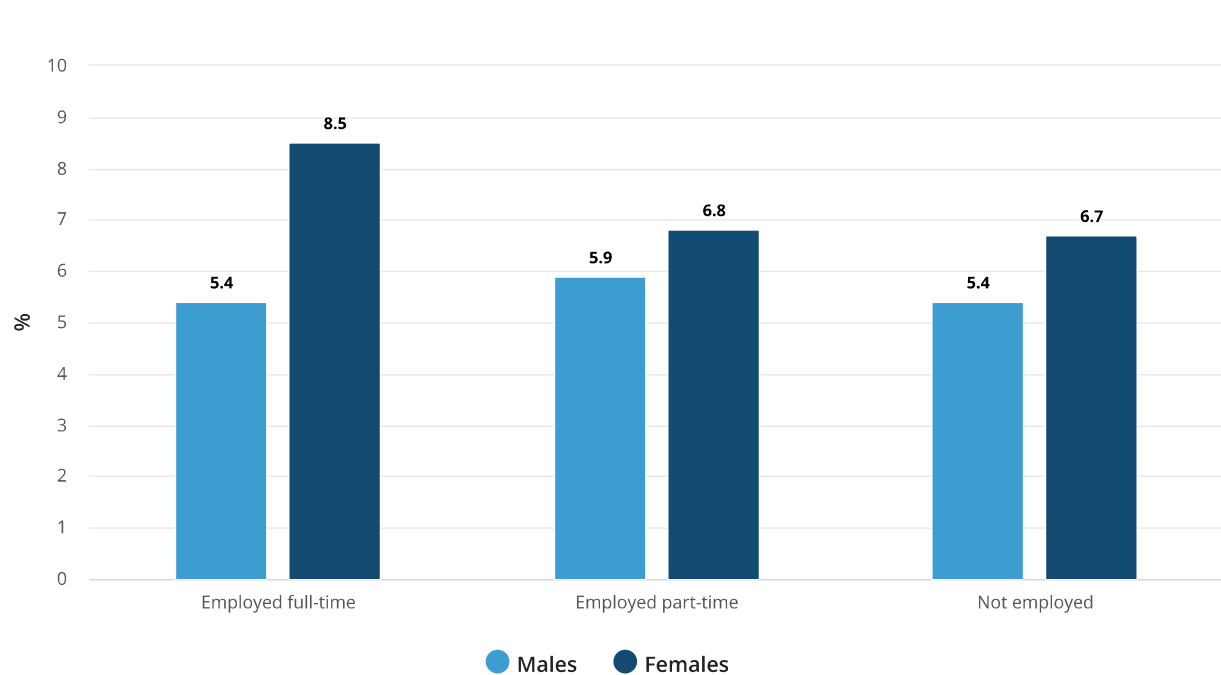
b. Calculated using the Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD).

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 2

Feedback

Women's participation in personal interest learning varied by their employment status. Women employed full-time were more likely to do personal interest learning (9% compared with 7% of women employed part-time and 7% of women who were not employed. Differences for men were not statistically significant.

16. Participation in personal interest learning, by employment status by sex(a)

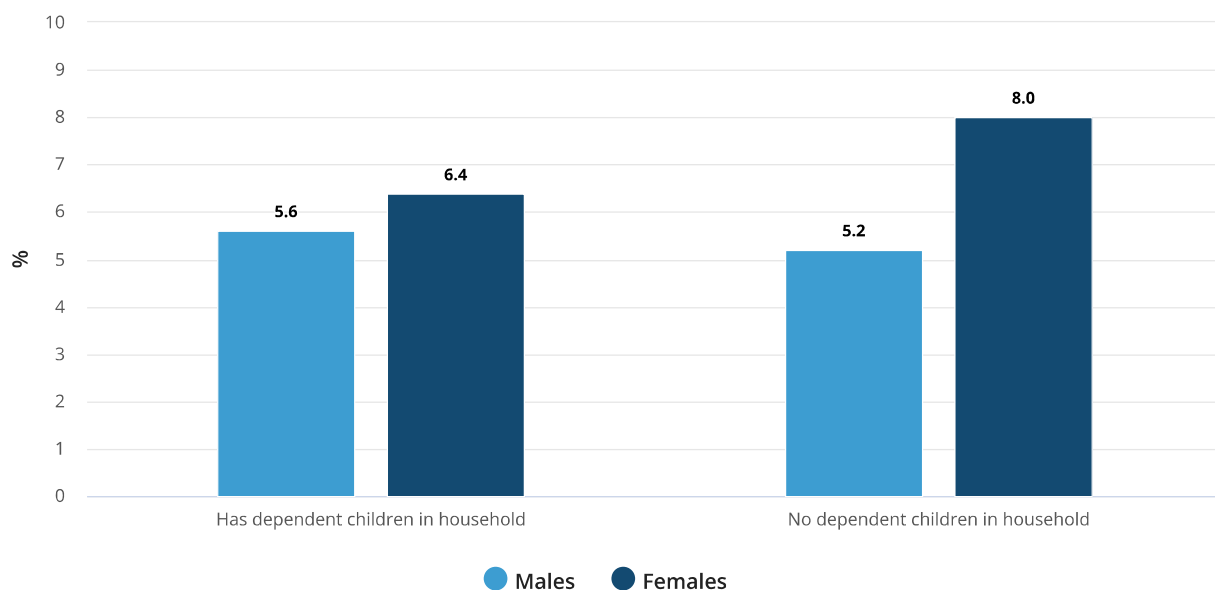


a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

Women in households with dependent children were less likely to do personal interest courses than women in households with no dependent children (6% compared with 8%). Differences for men were not statistically significant.

17. Participation in personal interest learning, by whether household has dependent children by sex(a)

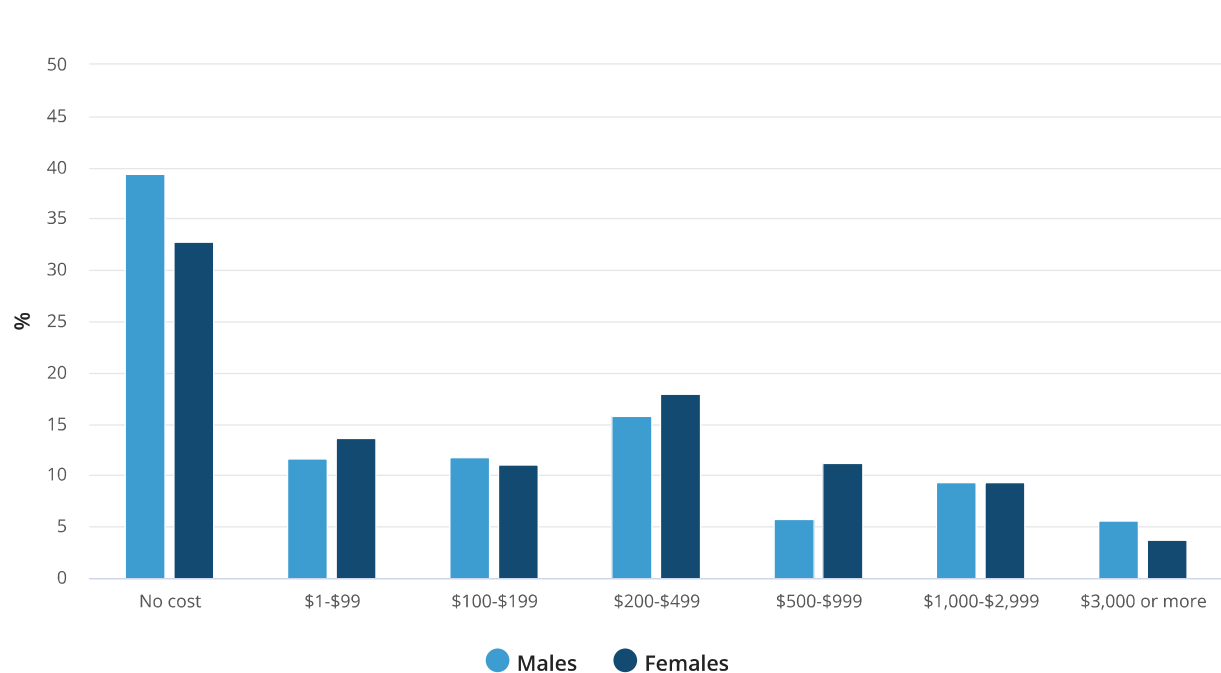


a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 2

One in three people (35%) who had done personal interest learning in the past 12 months did their most recent course at no personal cost, while 40% spent \$200 or more. Men were more likely to have done a course at no cost (39% compared with 33% of women), and were less likely to have undertaken a course with a cost of \$200 or more (36% compared with 42% of women).

18. Personal cost of most recent personal interest learning course, by sex(a)



a. Persons aged 15-74 years who participated in personal interest learning.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 13, Customised data

Almost half (47%) of people in the lowest quintile of equivalised weekly household income incurred no personal cost for their most recent course, compared with 35% of people on average. Around 7% of people in the highest household income quintile spent \$3,000 or more on their most recent personal interest course.

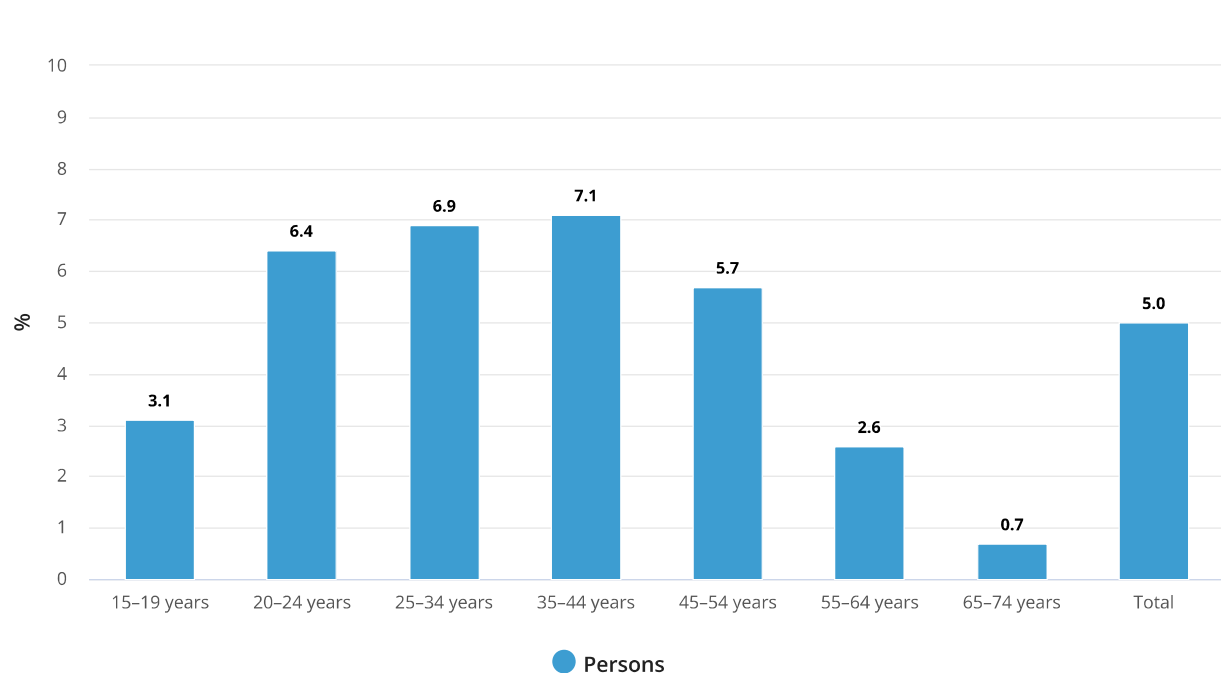
Feedback

Barriers to formal study

In 2020-21, 5% of Australians (924,000 people) had wanted to study for a non-school qualification at some time in the past 12 months but could not. This comprised 2% who wanted to enrol in a bachelor degree or above, and 3% who wanted to enrol in a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma.

Around 6% of people aged 20-24 years and 7% of people aged 25-54 years had barriers to formal study.

19. Barriers to formal study, by age(a)



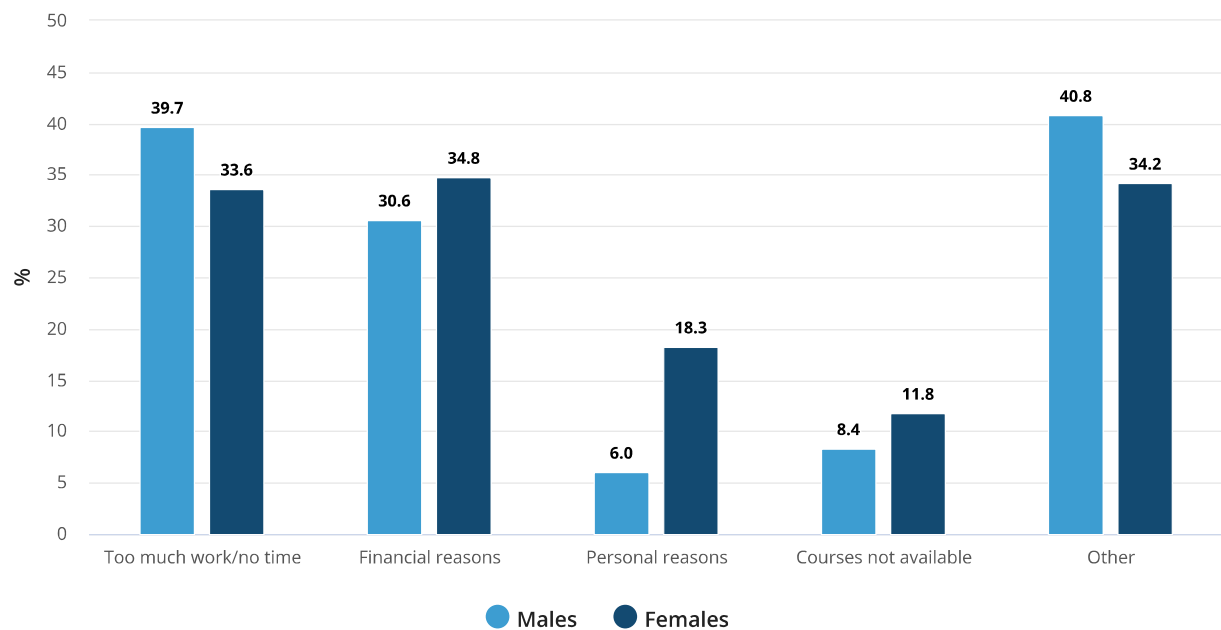
a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 14

People who had been enrolled in formal study in the last 12 months and were looking to enrol in additional study were more likely to experience barriers than people who had not been studying but wanted to (8% compared with 4%).

More women had barriers to formal study than men (6% compared with 4%). Just under 34% of women and 40% of men who had wanted to enrol but could not said it was because they had too much work or not enough time, and 35% and 31% respectively had financial barriers. Women were three times as likely, however, to cite personal reasons (such as no childcare, or ill-health) for wanting to study but not being able to: 18% compared with 6% of men. Around 12% of women and 8% of men said that the courses they wanted to do were not available.

20. All barriers to formal study, by sex(a)(b)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to enrol in (more) formal study but couldn't.

b. People can choose more than one barrier, therefore components may not add up to 100%.

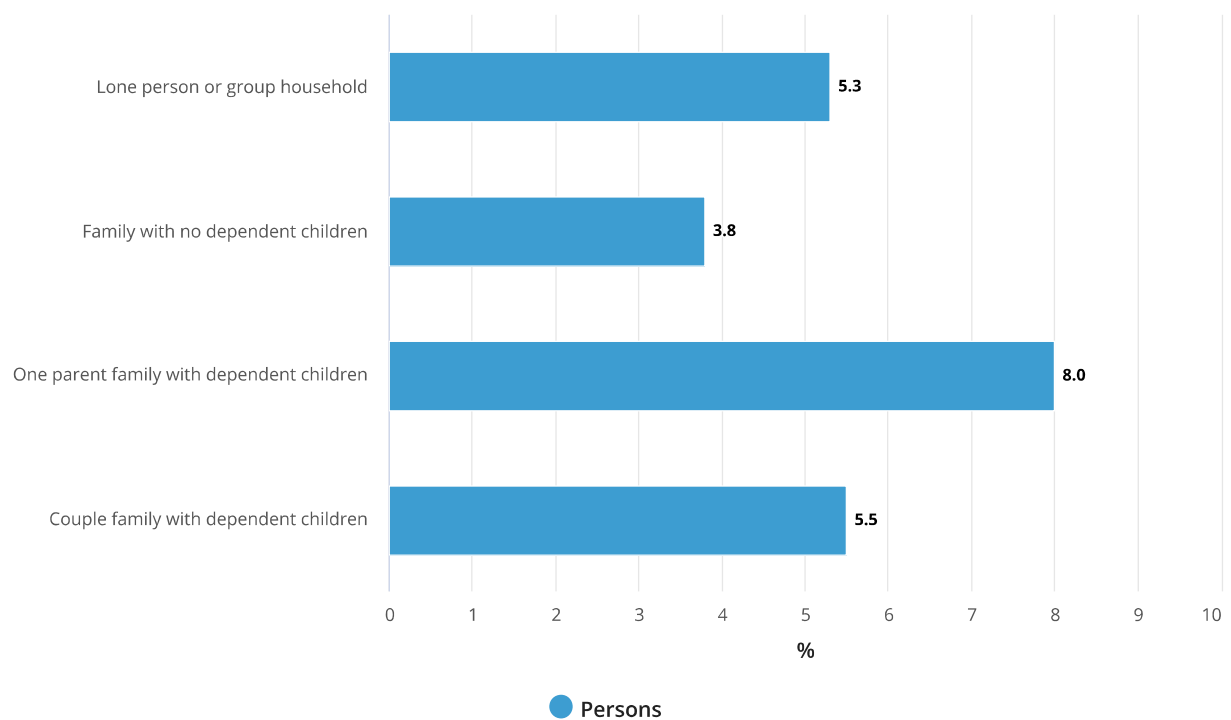
Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 15



Around 34% of women and 41% of men reported 'other barriers' to formal study. COVID-19 restrictions may have contributed to the higher level of 'other' responses in 2020-21. More than half (51%) of people who reported 'other barriers' to formal study also said they had experienced barriers to formal study because of COVID-19.

People in one parent households with dependent children were more likely to report barriers to formal study (8%, compared with 6% of those in couple family households with dependent children, and 4% of households without children).

21. Barriers to formal study, by family composition of household(a)

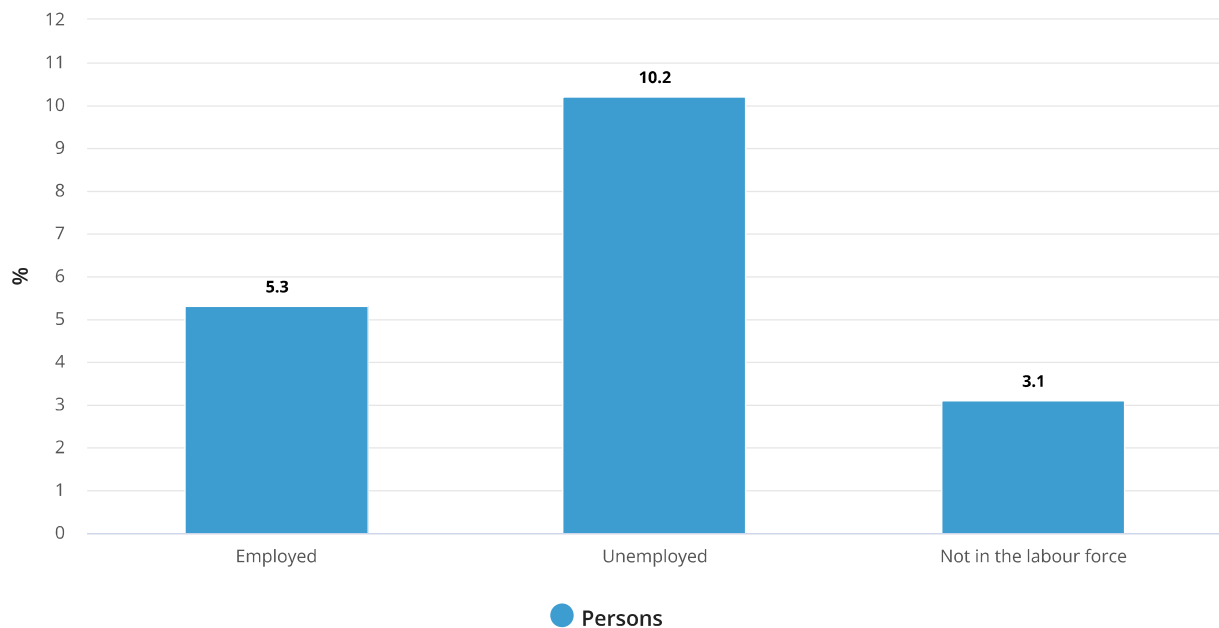


a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to enrol in (more) formal study but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 14

Employed people were half as likely to experience barriers as unemployed people (5% and 10% respectively), while only 3% of people who weren't in the labour force experienced barriers.

22. Barriers to formal study, by labour force status(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Table 14

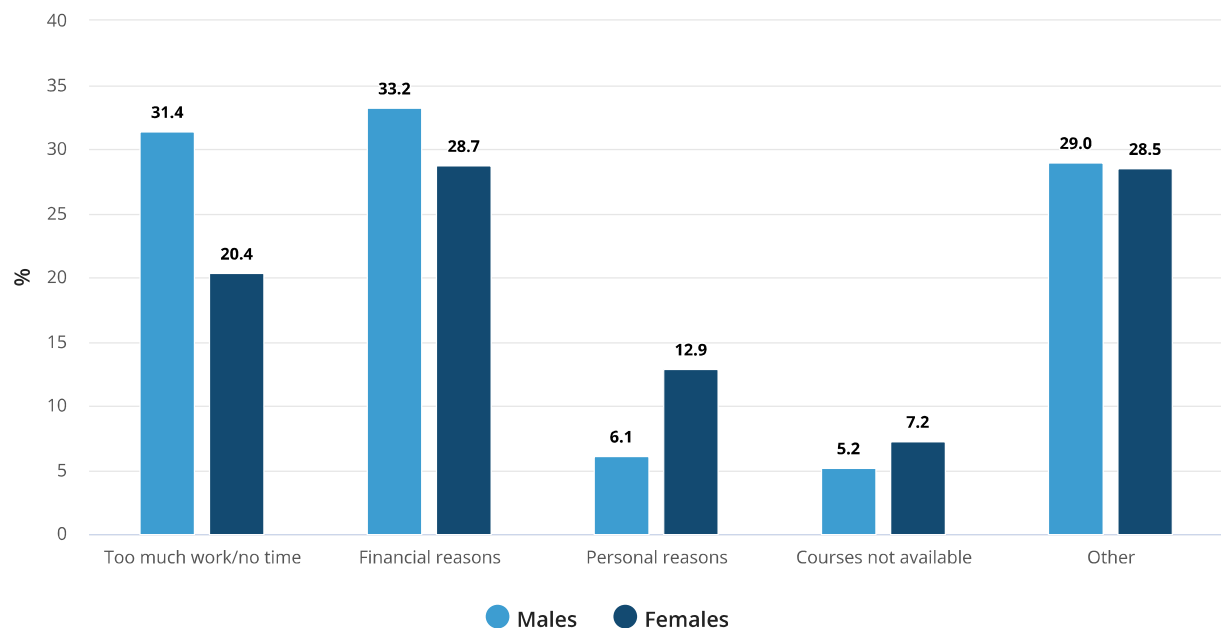
Using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage, people living in the areas of most disadvantage (the lowest index quintile) were more likely to report barriers to formal study than those living in the least disadvantaged areas (the highest index quintile): 6% compared with 4%.

People born in Australia were slightly less likely to have barriers to formal study than those born overseas (5% compared with 6%).

Main barrier to enrolling in a bachelor degree or above

Around 390,000 Australians (2%) had wanted to enrol in a bachelor degree or above in the past 12 months but could not. Almost a third (31%) of these people said their main barrier for this was financial, while a quarter said it was because they had too much work or not enough time (31% of men and 20% of women). Women were more likely to say their main barrier was personal reasons (13% compared with 6% of men).

23. Main reason did not enrol in a qualification at bachelor level or above, by sex(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to enrol in formal study at bachelor level or above but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

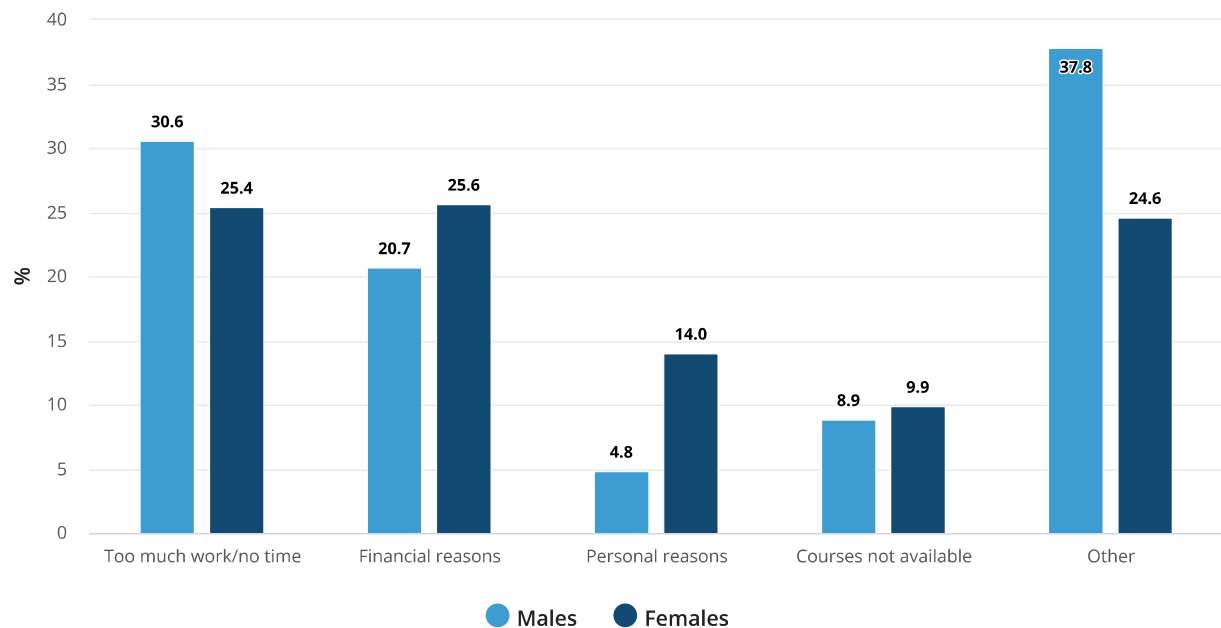
People living in major cities were slightly more likely to experience barriers to enrolling in bachelor degrees or above than those in regional and remote Australia (2.3% compared with 1.6%).

Having too much work or not enough time was more likely to be the main reason that people in major cities could not enrol in formal study when they had wanted to (28% compared with 15% of those in regional and remote Australia), however course availability was three times more likely to be a barrier for regional or remote Australians (13% compared with 4% in major cities).

Main barrier to enrolling in a qualification below bachelor level (certificate, diploma, or advanced diploma)

Around 638,000 Australians (3%) had wanted to enrol in a certificate, diploma, or advanced diploma but could not. For 28% of these people, the main reason was having too much work or not enough time, with 23% having financial barriers.

24. Main reason did not enrol in qualification below bachelor level, by sex(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to enrol in formal study below bachelor level but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

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Too much work or no time was more likely to be a barrier to study at this level for people in major cities (31%) than those in regional and remote areas (21%), however financial reasons were a greater barrier to people in regional and remote areas (28% compared with 19%).

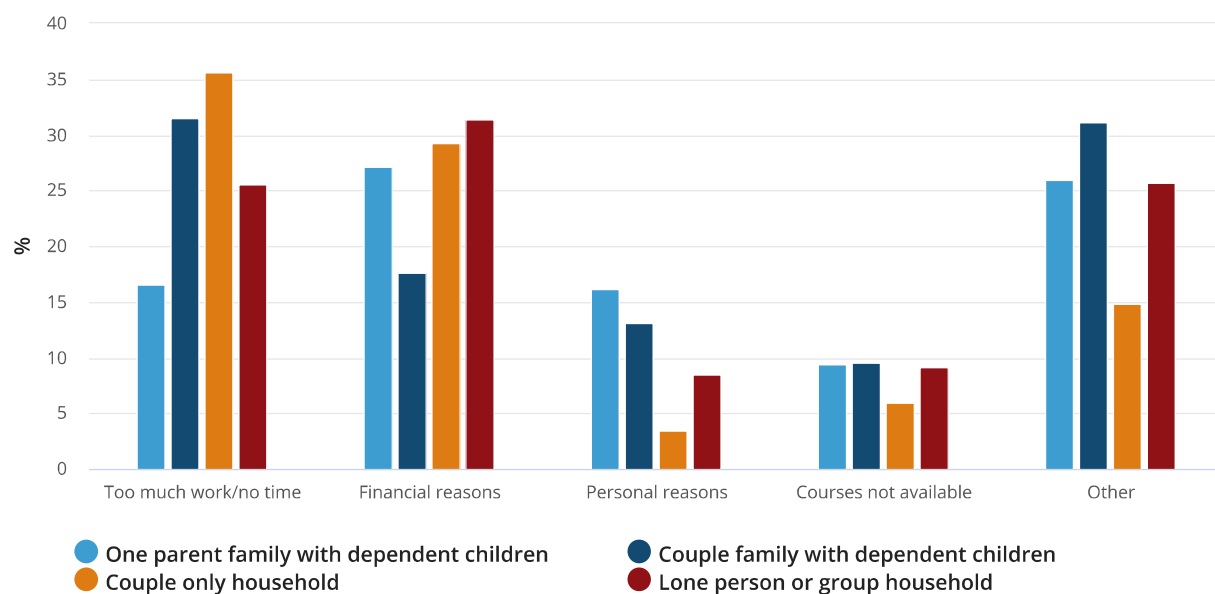
People who were unemployed (7%) were more likely than employed people (4%) to report barriers to enrolling in a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma. Those not in the labour force were least likely (2%).

People living in the areas of most disadvantage were twice as likely as those in the least disadvantaged areas to experience barriers to formal study below bachelor level (4% and 2% respectively).

Around 6% of people in one parent households with dependent children had barriers to study at this level, compared with 4% of people in couple family households with dependent children, 3% of families with no dependent children, and 4% of people in lone or group households.

Of people that had wanted to enrol in a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma but could not, 31% who were living alone or in group households had barriers for financial reasons, as did 27% of those in one parent households with dependent children, and 18% of those in couple family households with dependent children.

25. Main reason did not enrol in qualification below bachelor level, by family composition of household(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted enrol in formal study below bachelor level but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21, Customised data

Feedback

Barriers to non-formal learning

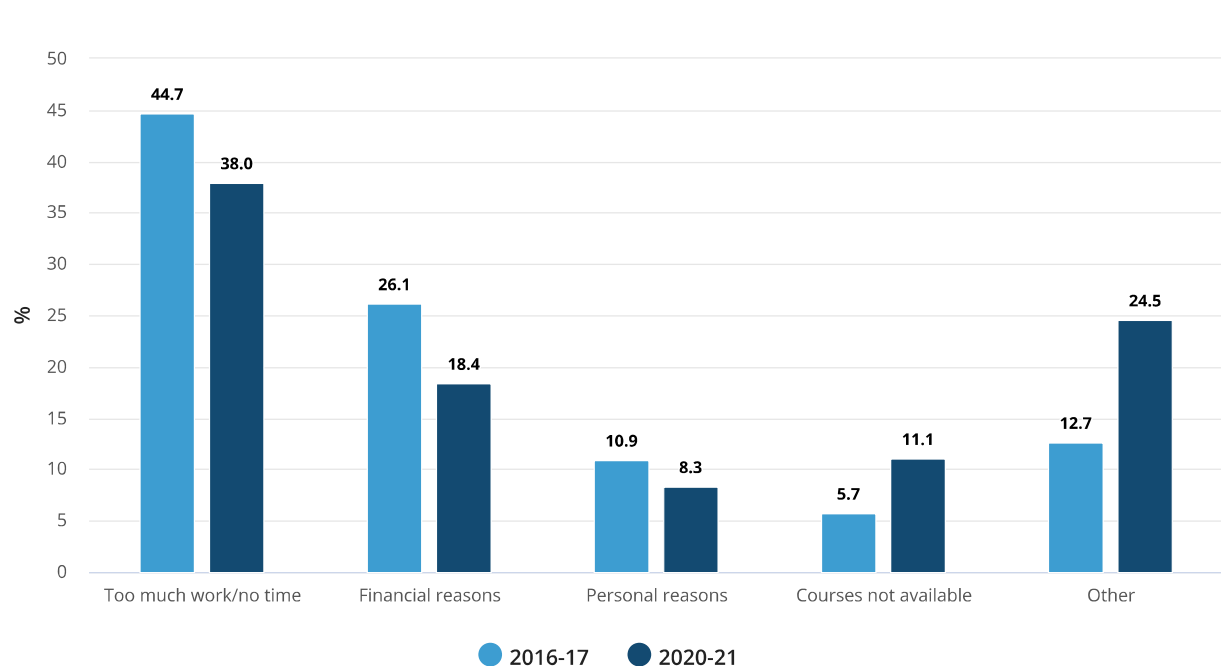
In 2020-21, just over 7% of Australians aged 15-74 years had wanted to do work-related or personal interest courses in the past 12 months but could not, a decrease from 11% in 2016-17.

Around 15% of people who had already done some non-formal learning in the past year reported barriers to doing more non-formal learning, while 4% of people who had not done any non-formal learning wanted to participate but could not.

The most commonly reported main barrier was having too much work or not enough time (38% of people with barriers) followed by 'other reasons' (25%), and financial reasons (18%).

People were nearly twice as likely in 2020-21 to report that courses they wanted to do were not available as in 2016-17 (11% compared with 6% in 2016-17). They were also nearly twice as likely to report they had barriers for 'other reasons' (25% compared with 13% in 2016-17).

26. Main barrier to non-formal learning, 2016-17 and 2020-21(a)



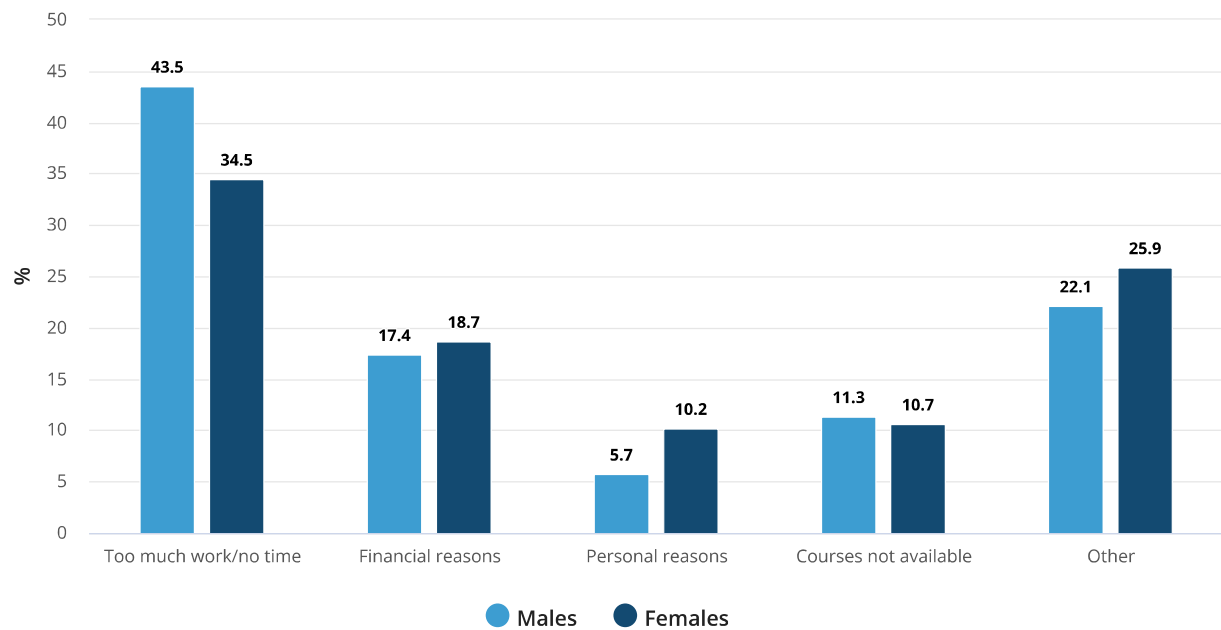
a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to participate in (more) non-formal learning but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2016-17 Table 15, 2020-21 Table 17

COVID-19 restrictions may have contributed to the higher level of 'other' responses in 2020-21. Almost three-quarters (74%) of people who reported 'other barriers' to non-formal learning also said they had experienced barriers to non-formal learning because of COVID-19.

Women (9%) were more likely than men (6%) to report barriers to non-formal learning. Men with barriers to non-formal learning were more likely to report too much work or not enough time as their main barrier (44% compared with 35% of women), while women with barriers were more likely to report personal reasons (including lack of childcare and ill-health): 10% compared with 6% of men.

27. Main barrier to non-formal learning, by sex(a)

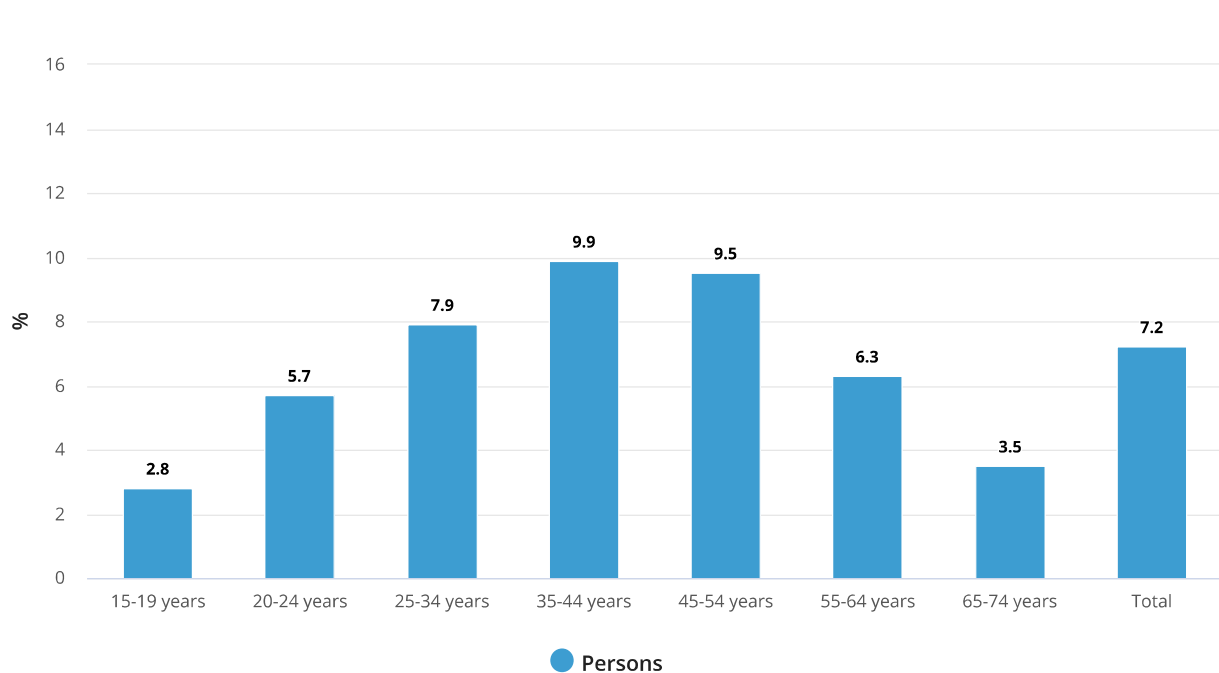


a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to participate in (more) non-formal learning but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2020-21, Table 17

People aged 35-54 years were the most likely to have had barriers to non-formal learning (10%).

28. Barriers to non-formal learning, by age(a)



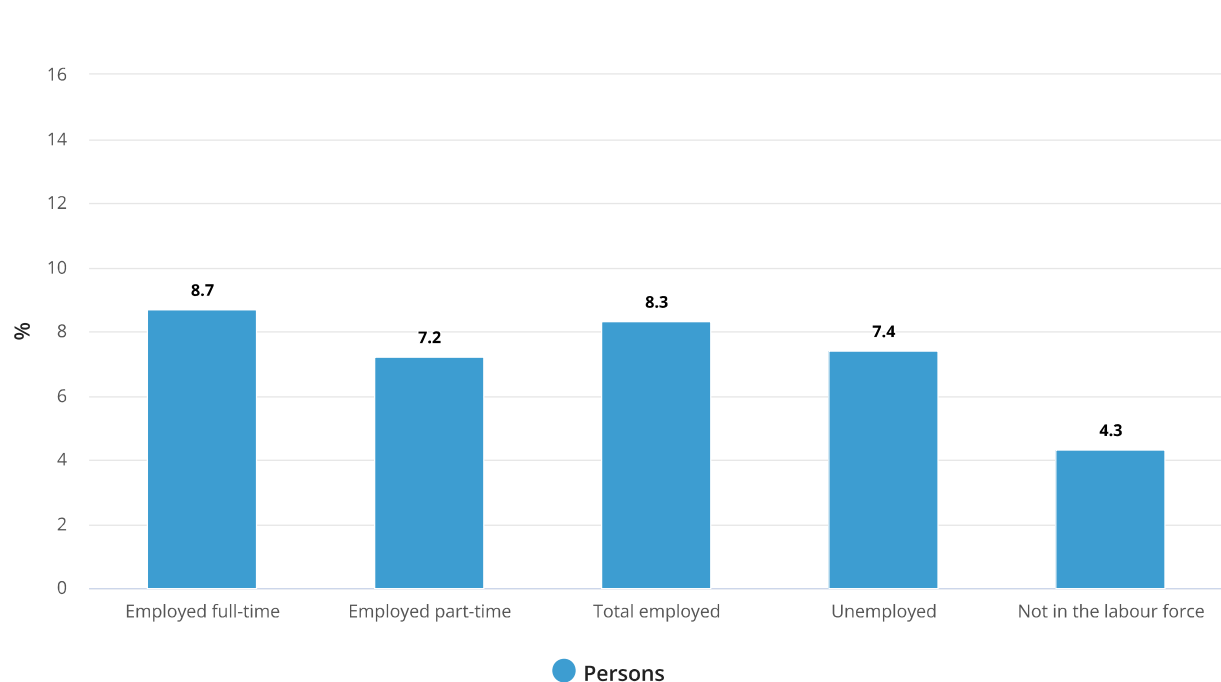
a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2020-21, Table 16

People who were employed full-time were the most likely to have barriers to non-formal learning (9%), followed by those employed part-time or unemployed (both 7%). People who were not in the labour force were the least likely to have barriers (4%).

29. Barriers to non-formal learning, by labour force status(a)

Feedback

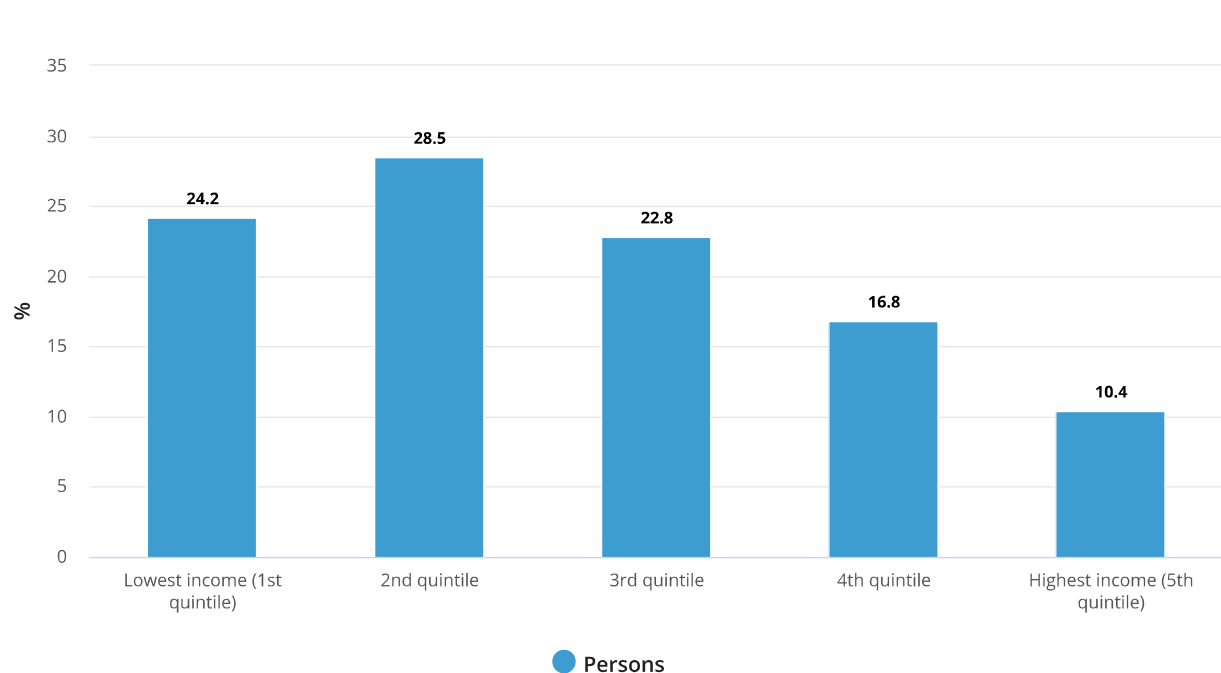


a. All persons aged 15-74 years.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2020-21, Table 16

As weekly household income increased, fewer people reported financial reasons as their main barrier to participating in non-formal learning. People in the lowest two quintiles of weekly household income were more than twice as likely to report financial reasons as their main barrier as those in the highest quintile (24% and 29% respectively, compared with 10%).

30. Financial reasons as main barrier, by equivalised weekly household income(a)



a. All persons aged 15-74 years who wanted to participate in (more) non-formal learning but couldn't.

Source: Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, 2020-21, Table 17

People in households with dependent children were almost twice as likely as those without dependent children to report personal reasons (which included lack of child-care) as their main barrier to participating in non-formal learning (11% compared with 6%).

People in regional and remote Australia were almost twice as likely as people in major cities to report their main barrier to non-formal learning as courses being unavailable (17% compared with 9%), while those in major cities were more likely to report having too much work or not enough time (41% compared with 29% of those in regional and remote areas).

Feedback

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